Under the law animals are human property.

Property is a thing owned by a legal person.

Things do not have legal rights.

Some people argue that animals should have rights.

Rivers, corporations and ships can be legal persons. This means they have certain legal rights.

What about animals?

Some lawyers in the US argue that animals, like chimpanzees and elephants, should have basic rights protected under the law.

One of their clients is a chimpanzee called Tommy who lives in a cage in a caravan park.

They are trying to convince the court to free Tommy from the caravan park, so he can lead a more natural life in an animal sanctuary.

They argue that chimpanzees have certain capacities (such as autonomy and self-awareness) that entitle them to legal personhood.

For example, chimpanzees have language and culture, and can plan for the future.

The courts in the US have ruled that Tommy is a thing and not a legal person. However, one judge said that chimpanzees are not just “things.”

What do you think?

Question: whether animals should be considered human property under the law.

Consider: the different views on this issue, and decide for yourself where you stand.

Discuss: with your friends, family, classmates and teachers. Debating complex issues is healthy and helpful.